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AMERICAN BEAUTIES

By M. C. S. NOBLE

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ONE day some years ago while holding a teachers' institute in a North Carolina county seat I was glad to receive from a friend an invitation to take tea with him in his good home on the edge of town.

He called for me in the early afternoon with his horse and buggy and gave me a delightful ride through the pretty streets of the little town which had already taken unto itself the name of "city" in its recently amended charter.

When we reached his home I was struck with the beauty of location, the easy graceful lines on which his house was built, the smooth green lawn surrounding it, and, in fact, with the "sum total" of all the things which a home needs to give it a pulling power on the owner when far away from it down the street. As I looked at the neatness and tidiness and good taste on every hand I knew the kind of wife I was going to meet long before she came to us on the porch, bade me a kindly welcome, and went back to her household duties.

When I expressed delight at seeing his good home, his pride was evident and he offered to show me through the house during the little while we had still to wait before going in to tea. I found it to be a simply but wisely planned building with many conveniences, and yet it was unmarred by any of the intricacies of architecture, if I may be allowed to employ that phrase to include "gingerbread" work on the outside and bewildering little halls and stairways on the inside.

The room which took the strongest hold on me was a little cramped up affair up in the attic next to the roof. The strong hold that this room took on me was not due to the room itself, for I had seen many a room just like it before; but it was due to what I saw in the room and to the fact that I could see in the father's face a just and natural pride in that which we were looking at and which he explained to me in few and pointed words.

The gist of what he said to me was this: His boy, like hundreds of other boys, had great fondness for mechanics and electricity. These subjects were full of mystery, interest, and attraction for him. This room was his to use as he pleased for a laboratory in which to look for and work with all those things of mystery, interest, and attraction that he

might be able to find as he groped about by himself in the wonderland of science.

The boy lacked one year of completing the high school course, and his inborn interest, feeding upon what he had "caught on to" in the little science primer used in the school, had put him to work in the high up laboratory of his own furnishing. I do not know enough about science to tell exactly what he had, but there were jars, and batteries, and weights and pulleys, magnifying glasses, a telephone receiver, two or three old clocks, a telegraphic instrument, electric bells, a few bottles of acids, and—well, I am showing by the way I tell it that I do not even know how to tell just what I did see.

The father told me that his boy had learned a little telegraphy down at the railroad station, and also something about wireless telegraphy from a former schoolmate back home last summer on a vacation from his battleship; that he had run a line from his little laboratory to the house of a retired Western Union operator and was learning rapidly; that he had a wireless outfit with which he had often "picked up" calls, and that he was also intensely interested in an elementary course in chemistry which the new assistant in the high school had recently begun with one of his classes. And he also said that this assistant had been elected to teach in a state university the next year. But we were just then called to tea and after enjoying it and the "home talk" afterwards for an hour or two, I returned to my hotel for the night.

After the close of the institute I boarded the train for home. Luck would have it that, owing to the crowds, I found myself seated with a well known college professor of chemistry—a man whose department had fully two hundred men to enter it every year—and I naturally thought of my friend's young son with natural scientific instincts and tastes. And knowing that the father wished the boy, other things being equal, to attend the college in which my companion taught chemistry, I told him about the young fellow.

I told him of the boy's innate fondness for science, how he had equipped his little laboratory with all sorts of home-made apparatus; how he had rigged up the telegraphic instruments, and how deeply he was interested in chemistry; and then I reached the climax with the statement that the father wanted his

son to attend my friend's institution and make a specialty of chemistry and physics.

But no man ever received a greater shock than I then received. My scientific friend declared that the father was taking the wrong course with his boy. "I find," said he, "that boys of the kind you mention come to me with a smattering which unfits them for real scientific work, and that not one of them is ever a satisfactory student in science. By all means that boy ought to study the regularly prescribed subjects which fit one for college and let science alone till he gets into college and then let me have him after he has completed his Freshman year at least. I'd rather have a boy take up science for the first time who had never thought one moment about it but had had careful, drastic drill in Latin and Greek. If I am to try to teach him any chemistry, I would rather have him know something about Latin and Greek than to know all this stuff, this play stuff, this injurious smattering you have been telling me about."

I did not know just what to say to this, but I told him I thought that possibly if a boy who was interested in chemistry could study it under a competent instructor before he went to college, he would be better prepared to study the subject when he reached college.

He said that I was entirely wrong; that any boy who wished to study science ought first to have his mind *trained*, and that there was nothing better to train his mind "with" or "on" or "in" (I have forgotten which) than Latin and Greek; and that when a boy had had his mind thus trained, he could then be turned over to a science teacher with a reasonable expectation of results.

I then ventured to inquire if he didn't think that the mind of a boy could be trained to study science by studying *it*; but my friend, in his enthusiasm for the correctness of his formula for making a scientist, declared that teaching a boy science in a high school really unfitted him for successful college work in science.

I asked how he could hold that a boy's study of Latin in a high school fitted him for studying it in college and at the same time hold that his studying science in a high school unfitted him for studying that science in a college. His reply was that I did not understand all the limitations, conditions, and hindrances connected with the study of a science; and then he rolled and lit another cigarette, while I realized that I was enjoying the conversation immensely. Finally, I asked him if he did not think that science courses in college ought to be made more practical; if he did not think that in chemistry, for

instance, a man ought to have something bearing directly on everyday life. This question seemed to give him much pleasure because it gave him opportunity to speak his creed as a teacher of chemistry; and he spoke with a good deal of declamation and professional stubbornness:

"I do not think of giving practical knowledge in chemistry to the men whom I teach. I am not trying to do that. I am always looking for some one boy who will make a great discovery in science. I care nothing for what you regard as of practical value to the average man. I have some two hundred men in my department every year. Among them I am looking for one in ten thousand who shall make some great contribution to science. I care nothing for that which you call the practical. The American Beauty Rose is made by plucking off all but one rose." And then the train blew, and I had to leave him. The boy went to college next fall full of thought about what he should get at the great institution; but after one year, he left disappointed and discouraged because, in effect, they told him that all that he had loved was fool's gold and not American beauties.

THE LATIN COLUMN

THE DEFENSE OF HIGH SCHOOL LATIN

THE study of Latin has been defended at many times and in many places, frequently including these columns. But such arguments as we usually read and hear are often unsuited for effective use by the high school teacher when she is asked by a pupil or his parents: "Why should an American boy or girl spend so much time studying a dead language, which is not used at all in practical present-day life?"

Yet if the teacher does not have on the tip of her tongue a convincing answer to such questions, many pupils are likely to be lost to the Classics. These words are written with the object of giving some suggestions which may be of use in such embarrassing and critical moments.

Clear, convincing and practical reasons for the study of Latin may be conveniently classified under three heads.

I. TRAINING IN HISTORY AND POLITICS

Comparisons of Cæsar's wars with the War of 1914-1918, and of Cicero's statesmanship with that of Wilson, are examples of ways of connecting up the Roman civilization with our own which should constantly be used in the classroom. Modern European and American civilization is based on that of